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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 000095

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PK IN

SUBJECT: INDIAN SKEPTICISM OF PAKISTAN PREVALENT DESPITE
NEW PROMISES

Classified By: Deputy PolCouns Les Viguerie for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (U) Corrected copy - new text.

¶2. (C) Summary: India's initial reaction to Interior Minister of Pakistan Rehman Malik's January 15 statements on investigating the Mumbai attacks has been skeptical. Foreign Minister Mukherjee explicitly criticized the Pakistani government for bypassing diplomatic channels and carrying out communications through the media. Complicating India's response, on January 16 Mukherjee reversed his previous day's comments, and stated that India had never given up its demand that perpetrators be handed over to India. End summary.

----- Indians Display Skepticism over Islamabad,s
Assurances -----

¶3. (C) The statements Interior Minister of Pakistan, Rehman Malik, made on January 15, announcing a task force, promising increased counter-terrorism cooperation and assuring unconditional support in the investigation into the Mumbai attacks, have been met with initial skepticism in India. Indian media extensively reported reactions to Malik's televised news conference in which he claimed that Pakistan had shut down five Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) camps and detaining 124 terrorists belonging to Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT). In a Times of India interview on January 15, Foreign Minister Mukherjee was dubious about Pakistan's reported action, and separately was particularly critical of Pakistan's method of communication. "Instead of being informed through the media," said Mukherjee in an official MEA statement, "I would happy to receive a direct response from Pakistan through existing diplomatic channels and to see Pakistan implementing her words."

¶4. (C) MEA Deputy Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran Division) G. Balasubramanian reiterated to PolOff the GOI's disappointment that Pakistan was communicating through the media rather than official channels. "Unfortunately, things are happening through the media and we have not received anything," he said referring to the official silence from both Islamabad and the Pakistani High Commission in Delhi on the issue of Pakistan's response to India's call for better cooperation. "We are communicating normally on all other issues, but on this issue we are still waiting." Referring to the dossier of information India provided Pakistan last week through diplomatic channels, he said "communication is open with them, so that is not the issue) the issue is (the

lack of) a formal response to the material we handed over to which there has been no official response". Asked if Delhi would take more seriously Malik's offers of handling a joint investigation, Balasubramanian explained that India had been disappointed enough with Pakistan's performance through the Joint Action Terrorism Mechanism and did not see how a separate joint investigation would be more helpful.

----- Mukherjee's Double Reverse on Extradition -----

¶5. (C) Despite Mukherjee's criticism of Pakistan's means of indirect communication on this issue through the press, the External Affairs Minister appeared to offer a softer tone when compared to previous statements. In an interview with Indian television news channel "Aaj Tak" on January 15, Mukherjee apparently reversed India's previous position and said that "It would be ideal if they (Pakistan's government) can hand over the fugitives. If that is not possible, there should at least be a fair trial of these fugitives in Pakistan." Also on January 15, another Indian TV news channel, NDTV, reported that Indian officials privately concede they never thought Pakistan would extradite any of the suspects and that public demands were meant to pressure Islamabad. Electronic media in India played it out as the victory of Indian diplomacy in eliciting a somewhat desired Pakistani response by using pressure from the U.S. and other western countries.

¶6. (C) However, in the afternoon of January 16, in what Balasubramanian described as a "clarification," Mukherjee reverted to India's previous position on extradition. "We

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have never given up the demand that the perpetrators be handed over to India," he said.

----- Contacts Express Hope for Progress -----

¶7. (C) Prior to Mukherjee's "clarification," Dr. Ashok Behuria, a Fellow at the GOI-funded Institute of Defense Studies and Analyses, suggested to Poloff that Indian anger against Pakistan had lessened as people began to realize that calling off the peace process and derailing the Composite Dialogue would not serve India's foreign policy goals in the region as well as internationally. He warned, however, that the Indian Government would not necessarily demonstrate the same softness as it gets closer to competing with opposition parties in the run up to parliamentary elections this spring.

Evident of the former statement is Mukherjee's comments to the press that the Mumbai attacks raised "a very large question mark over the achievements of the Composite Dialogue process over the last 4.5 years."

¶8. (C) In contrast to Indian Home Minister Chidambaram's statement earlier this week which raised the possibility of cutting all ties with Pakistan and left open the military option, Mukherjee said Chidambaram's statement had simply illustrated one of the various options and that it was not the decision of the government to make, according to Times of India. The strong statements by Chidambaram were simply made, according to Dr. Harish Khare, Political Editor of the Hindu, to drive the point home that Pakistan was still not sincere in acting against the terrorists. But with Malik's announcement of the Federal Investigative Agency task force, the Indian Government will be more able to convince the public that its pressuring tactics have worked to a certain degree, Khare argued.

¶9. (C) Comment: Despite Mukherjee's double reverse on the extradition issue and the display of skepticism in the Indian media, Malik's statement and Pakistan's announced plan should provide the ruling UPA government with an opportunity to demonstrate to the Indian public that it is getting results from Islamabad if Pakistan actually follows through. Post will urge the Indian government to accept that the task force announcement is a positive development, and to take advantage

of the opportunity to foster a cooperative atmosphere with Islamabad to bring perpetrators of the Mumbai attacks to justice.

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